

Cuba Recalls Own Terror Experience

By ANITA SNOW

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HAVANA (AP) - The black and white photographs of people in mourning bear testimony to what Cubans view as the deadliest act of terrorism committed against their country - an airliner bombing that killed 73 people.

One image on display at the Interior Ministry Museum shows teen-agers filing past caskets draped with Cuban flags. Others show an older man comforting his sobbing wife, and hundreds of thousands crowding Havana's Revolution Plaza to remember the victims killed 25 years ago this week.

``We have an explosion aboard, we are descending immediately!" reads the transcript of the pilot's last words with the control tower in Seawell, Barbados. ``Seawell, CU-455, we are requesting immediate landing... . We have a total emergency!"

After last month's terror attacks in the United States, Cubans recalled their own experience with terror on Oct. 6, 1976, when a bomb planted by opponents of Fidel Castro's government blew up the Cubana de Aviacion airliner.

The government has called a rally for the anniversary on Saturday to remember those who died.

Several government officials were among the 57 Cuban victims. But most were civilians, including members of the island's fencing team. Five Koreans and 11 citizens of the South American nation of Guyana also died.

After the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the government sponsored a rally to express solidarity with Americans. It also condemned the attacks but added: "It is not possible for our people to forget that for more than 40 years they have been the victim of just such actions promoted from the same American soil."

Few Cubans know their country remains on the U.S. State Department's terrorism watch list with six other nations: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, North Korea and Sudan.

Cuba deeply resents being on the list, especially because it says it stopped actively supporting armed struggle in Latin America and elsewhere more than a decade ago. Earlier, Cuba did provide training, arms and funding to leftist rebels around the world.

"Our country speaks with total moral authority in saying that it would never undertake a terrorist act," Cuba's U.N. Ambassador Bruno Rodriguez told United Nations members Monday.

U.S. officials concede there is no evidence Cuba has sponsored specific terror acts in recent years. The nation remains on the list for three reasons: U.S. fugitives on the island, Cuba's contacts with Colombian guerrilla groups, and several Basque separatists who are in the country.

"When Cuba is proclaimed a terrorist state with this type of argument it really hurts the credibility of the American government," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque earlier this year told Radio Progreso, a moderate Cuban-American station in Miami.

Perez Roque said both the presence of Basque separatists on the island and Cuba's contacts with Colombian rebels were approved by the Spanish and Colombian governments. Cuba has sponsored meetings between

Colombian representatives and guerrillas as part of that nation's peace process.

In the radio interview, Perez Roque didn't talk about the several dozen American fugitives living in Cuba. But in the past, Cuban officials have noted the country has no extradition treaty with the United States, which severed diplomatic relations in 1961.

The American fugitives include former Black Panther Joanne Chesimard, who lives here under the name Assata Shakur. She was convicted in 1977 of killing a New Jersey state trooper.

Cuba has its own problems trying to extradite people it wants to try for terrorism.

Panama earlier this year refused Havana's request to extradite over Cuban-born Luis Posada Carriles, 72, for trial in the airliner attack and a series of bombings in 1997 on tourist sites. Posada Carriles has denied any role in the airliner attack but has admitted involvement in the bombings.

He has been jailed since Nov. 17 in Panama, where he was arrested after Castro arrived there for a regional summit and declared that his old nemesis was in the country plotting to kill him.

Two Venezuelan men were convicted in the jetliner bombing and each sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in Venezuela. A fourth man, Cuban exile Orlando Bosch, spent 11 years behind bars in Venezuela during a lengthy judicial process but was ultimately acquitted.

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Lawmakers remember Cuban terror victims, approve international treaties

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HAVANA (AP) -- Paying homage to those killed 25 years ago in the bombing of a Cuban jetliner, lawmakers on Thursday unanimously signed a series of international anti-terrorism treaties. President Fidel Castro presided over the special session, but did not address the National Assembly. However in a letter Wednesday to Ricardo Alarcon, the assembly president, Castro had recommended approval. After the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, Castro said there was "the need to strengthen the authority of the United Nations during the current crisis."

The Cuban leader wrote that the action was necessary for "the battle that our country is fighting to repudiate" terrorism and prevent "useless and dangerous wars that multiply violence and hate among nations." The Cuban action follows an appeal from U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan for nations to sign 12 anti-terrorism treaties adopted by the U.N. General Assembly since 1963. Only five have been ratified by more than 100 countries. Nine anti-terrorism treaties were signed Thursday. Previously, Cuba had signed only three.

Since the terror attacks on New York and the Pentagon, Castro has suggested the United Nations is best suited to take the lead in any international effort against terrorism. He also has called for a solution that would prevent massive military action. Lawmakers held a minute of silence for the victims of the Oct. 6, 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner that killed 73 people off the coast of Barbados. Two Venezuelan

men were convicted in the deadliest act of terror ever committed against communist Cuba and each sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Also, Cuban exile Orlando Bosch spent 11 years behind bars in Venezuela during a lengthy judicial process that ended with acquittal. He now lives in Miami. Luis Posada Carriles, another Cuban exile, was arrested in the attack but escaped from Venezuelan prison. He currently is being held in Panama on charges of plotting to assassinate Castro during a visit to that country for a regional summit last year.

Panama has refused Cuba's request to extradite him. A government rally to remember the victims is planned for Saturday, the 25th anniversary of that attack. Cuba is on the U.S. State Department's list of nations that sponsor terrorism for many years, a status the island nation says is unwarranted.